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How Not to Be: D. H. Lawrence's "The Ship of Death"

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Introduction

This article explores the peculiar notions of "being" and "not being", and of access to "being" as a passage through "not being", in D. H. Lawrence's poem "The Ship of Death" (1993, 716–20) and its significant—though transient—intertextual echoes and borrowings from Hamlet's famous soliloquy. I will try to show how the Lawrentian I then subtly sheds its own "being" so as to furtively interpret his very personal version of Hamlet's "being" which, in the meantime, he subversively blames for not knowing how to be.

In May 1911, the young D. H. Lawrence wrote to his sweetheart, Louie Burrows:

I am so Hamletty—I am so confoundedly and absurdly Hamletty, it's enough to make you sick. When I begin to rant in the 'To be or not to be' style, you should say, 'Hello, he's off again,' and wait for the rhyme which rings conclusion if not reason. (Lawrence 1979, 269)

These at once amused and dramatically serious words, which cast Hamlet as a melodramatic character, set the tone for Lawrence's written references to *Hamlet* throughout his life. Between 1911 and 1927, he recurrently referred to or quoted short passages of the play in his letters. In May 1913, for instance, he wrote to Edward Garnett, "if Hamlet and Oedipus were published now, they wouldn't sell more than 100 copies, unless they were pushed" (Lawrence 1979, 546). In 1922, to Amy Lowell, he quoted the play: "I am enjoying the face of the earth and letting my Muse, dear hussy, repent her ways. 'Get thee to a nunnery' I said to her" (Lawrence 1991, 243). In his collection of essays *Twilight in Italy*, first published in 1916, he devotes a long subsection entitled "The Theatre" to his reactions to a performance of the play he saw in Italy in 1913 and, annoyed, condemns Hamlet for being excessively self-conscious. In his famous novel *Women in Love*, published in 1921, Birkin, one of the four main characters, complains, "One shouldn't talk when one is tired and wretched—One Hamletises, and it seems a lie" (2000, 187), once more introducing Hamlet as an almost melodramatic figure. Hamlet's words are also subtly present in the poem "And Oh—That the Man I Am Might Cease to Be",

published in 1917. As he contemplates the imminence of death, the Lawrentian I expresses his wish to see Nature and himself caught and carried away into the thick darkness of oblivion, hence suggesting Hamlet's words from Act 3, Scene 1: "a consummation / Devoutly to be wished". Like Hamlet, but from a different perspective, he ponders on the idea of sleep, implicitly and tentatively relating it to transient oblivion: "What is sleep? / It goes over me like a shadow over a hill". The presence of Hamlet reappears years later more explicitly in a longer and more famous poem "The Ship of Death", which was posthumously published in 1932.

The apparitions of Hamlet's words in Lawrence's letters, essays, fictional and poetic writings show the poet and novelist's intimate acquaintance with the play and an idiosyncratic interpretation of it. As often with Lawrence, they give way to ambiguous reactions, mixing pleasure in the poetic mouthing of dramatic speeches with fierce anger at the scope of the words. He makes his equivocal stance clear in the poem "When I Read Shakespeare":

When I read Shakespeare I am struck with wonder
that such trivial people should muse and thunder
in such lovely language.

[. . .]

And Hamlet, how boring, how boring to live with,
so mean and self-conscious, blowing and snoring
his wonderful speeches, full of other folks' whoring!

[. . .]

How boring, how small Shakespeare's people are!
Yet the language so lovely! Like the dyes from gas-tar.

(Lawrence 1993, 494)

Lawrence thus almost comically explains both his contempt for Shakespeare's characters and his admiration for the playwright's poetic language. In "The Ship of Death" he relies on this double-edged position as he fleetingly makes Hamlet's words his own and then refutes Hamlet's worried and self-conscious stance before death.

Before going further, Lawrence's use of *Hamlet* deserves to be apprehended within a historical and textual frame of reference, since his approach to Shakespeare's play was renewed by the early twentieth-century zeitgeist. As Max Plowman rightly remarks, "every age finds its own portrait of Hamlet" (712). In the modernist era, the heroic figure perceived by the Romantics was undergoing a considerable new turn. Jeffrey Perl, in *The Tradition of Return*, insists on this contrast between the Romantic perception and the modern destabilisation of the heroic figure (started, according to Perl by T. S. Eliot in "Hamlet and His Problems"), and thus makes Hamlet almost a symptom of cultural and ontological evolution:

Hamlet became the object of an almost religious veneration because romantics could identify easily with its protagonist, whose predicament symbolized

a conviction near and dear to their hearts [. . .]. The cultic adoration of Hamlet had been so universal since the time of Goethe and Coleridge that we may take 1919 as a turning point in aesthetic history simply because during that year a cheeky London review (T. S. Eliot) called Hamlet "an artistic failure" [. . .]. Eliot's essay, in fact, is a carefully contrived response to the various romantic *Hamlets*. (Perl 85)

The modern zeitgeist, led by new convictions and afflicted with new doubts about humans' fundamental nature, implied that the more traditional image of Hamlet no longer fitted the condition of modern humanity. Hamlet's words could not be trusted anymore, they had to be adapted to the period, and that is precisely what Stein does in Joseph Conrad's novel *Lord Jim*:

"Strictly speaking, the question is not how to get cured but how to live." He approved with his head, a little sadly, as it seemed. "*Ja! Ja!* In general adapting the words of your great poet: That is the question. . ." He went on nodding sympathetically. . . "How to be! *Ach!* How to be." (Conrad 128)

Hamlet's closed question "To be, or not to be", whose binary nature has a somewhat reassuring effect, has been replaced by Stein with the open interrogation "how to be", which reveals both a modern ontological instability and also the aporetic nature of the question suggested by the absence of a question mark.

Hamlet, therefore, is not just any text. Along with *Faust* and the *Oresteia* it is, as George Steiner defines it in *The Death of Tragedy*, a "world possession" (46) whose highly metaphysical scope, however obscure it may have appeared, has fascinated various commentators, psychoanalysts and poets. The modernists, like Conrad, Eliot and Lawrence, as they made use of Shakespeare's play, brought further rupture with the immediate past. In reinterpreting the play, they broke away from Romantic interpretations and hence prompted a literary crisis: their intertextual exploitation of *Hamlet*, written by a playwright who himself was violating the neoclassical precepts of tragedy, clearly subverts or revolutionises the immediately preceding understanding of the play, while simultaneously inscribing the modernists' text in the universal canon. To be or not to be part of the British literary tradition, here is the dilemma which seems to surface in the modernist writers' uses of *Hamlet*. But more accurately, the fundamental question revealed in their intertextual and dramatic interpretation of the play is rather how to be inscribed in the tradition while simultaneously seeking to revolutionise it and make it new. T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock* summarises to some extent this modernist revolutionary and innately paradoxical stance when he claims, "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be" (Eliot 16). The focus of the line on "to be", which resonates with Hamlet's soliloquy, subtly contradicts *Prufrock*'s introductory denial of his own identification with Hamlet.

Lawrence, deliberately or not, made use of this revolutionary underlying principle as he used Hamlet's words to deliver messages about immediate cultural crises, about humanity and more indirectly about the status of the poetic voice, as he

constantly oscillated between the ideas of “being”, “not being” and, like Conrad’s character, “how to be”. Through studying “The Ship of Death”, in which Hamlet’s words are handled, or actually mishandled, by Lawrence, this article will show how Lawrence’s conception of “not being” is a way to have eventual access to what he positively sees as “being”. I will first be focusing on the transitional moment Lawrence chooses to borrow scraps of Hamlet’s speech, a moment of both cultural and ontological rupture. This should lead us to the significance of Lawrence’s intertextual borrowing as he contemplates the idea of suicide. Finally the article will focus on Lawrence’s renewing poetic performance of Hamlet, as he wears the mask of the Shakespearean persona, thus “not being” himself but incarnating the other.

Transitional Processes

Written a few months before the poet’s death, “The Ship of Death” captures the poetic I’s quite peaceful apprehension of forthcoming oblivion. The I-voice is preparing its passage through the state of “not being” at the end of a natural cycle, when autumn fruit is falling:

Now it is autumn and the falling fruit
and the long journey towards oblivion.

The apples falling like great drops of dew
to bruise themselves an exit from themselves.

And it is time to go, to bid farewell
to one’s own self

On the verge of death, Lawrence then explains, one can have two different reactions: either one builds one’s “ship of death” to sail across the sea of change (and, unlike Hamlet, not one “of trouble”) or one rather makes “his own quietus [. . .] / with a bare bodkin”. Lawrence thus turns to Hamlet at a critical moment in the individual’s existence, the moment of death. But this individual crisis is intimately coupled with Lawrence’s awareness of a much broader cultural crisis.

Throughout his oeuvre, in his poetry, fiction and essays, Lawrence condemns the damage caused by modern society to the individual. According to him, Christianity started annihilating physical instincts, granting all power to the mind, and modern industrialism and machinery were dramatically completing the process of destruction. “Evil is mechanical” Lawrence asserts in a poem (1993, 713–14), fully aware of a massive cultural crisis in early twentieth-century Europe. Rationization, hyper-consciousness and mechanicity have taken over, thus transforming what was meant by “being”. In a letter addressed to Ernest Collings in January 1913, Lawrence wrote:

We know too much. No, we only *think* we know such a lot. A flame isn’t a flame because it lights up two, or twenty objects on the table. It’s a flame because it is itself. And we have forgotten ourselves. We are Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. We cannot be. “To be or not to be”—it is the question

with us *now*, by Jove. And nearly *every Englishman* says "*Not to be.*" [. . .] The real way of living is to answer to one's wants. Not "I want to light up with my intelligence as many things as are possible"—but "For the living of my full flame—I want that liberty, I want that woman, I want that pound of peaches, I want to go to sleep, I want to go to the pub, and have a good time, I want to look a beastly swell today, I want to kiss that girl, I want to insult that man. (1979, 504, emphasis mine)

Lawrence's contemporary Western world has, according to him, killed the self: it has organised what he calls in "The Theatre" "the omission of the self" (72), the end of the aristocracy of the self. People are therefore merging into a threatening democratic mass of "Not-Me" (72) and losing their individual specificities. But for Lawrence, the nature of this modern process is not new. It is both the long-term consequence and the mere repetition of what had already occurred during the Renaissance:

The monk rose up with [. . .] the Christian ecstasy. There was a death to die: the flesh, the self, must die, so that the spirit should rise again immortal, eternal infinite. I am dead unto myself, but I live in the Infinite. The finite Me is no more, only the Infinite, the Eternal, is. At the Renaissance this great half-truth overcame the other great half-truth. The Christian Infinite, reached by a process of abnegation, a process of being absorbed, dissolved, diffused into the great Not-Self, supplanted the old pagan Infinite, wherein the self like a root threw out branches and radicals which embraced the whole universe, became the Whole. ("The Theatre" 71)

The abnegation of the self took over the liveliness of the pagan *élan vital*. In the Renaissance, according to Lawrence, the energy of the Me was superseded by the moribund Christian Not-Self. Lawrence's comments on, and regrets about, the modern loss of what is meant by "being" blatantly echo what he says here about the Renaissance, where he persistently insists on the responsibility of Christianity for the eventual omission of the self. For him, both the Renaissance and modernity suffer equally from intense pangs that are akin in nature.

This conflation of different periods of history in the Lawrentian discourse is coupled with another type of conflation pointed out by Neil Corcoran. It is the conflation of preoccupations about the individual with preoccupations on the state of a nation. Corcoran remarks that in his essay "The Theatre," Lawrence allies "the privacy of 'the soul' with the fate of a nation" (Corcoran 219). Lawrence indeed persistently asserts that the death of King I, ending the overpowering aristocracy, corresponds to the end of the aristocracy of the self and the beginning of the loss of the Me. All these aspects which reveal the dissolution of the self in masses of indeterminate beings, and that, according to Lawrence, are regrettably blatant in immediate modern Europe, he finds in *Hamlet* too. He therefore brings the play into his poetry, and the gleam of decay he perceives in *Hamlet* is in keeping, or so he hopes the reader will perceive it to be, with the ambient state of decay in his contemporary Europe. Lawrence thus uses the rupture between vital paganism and Hamlet's Renaissance which he thinks are latent in the words he borrows

from Hamlet, in order to suggest, by a form of historical analogy, the crises of early twentieth-century disillusioned Europe. Both Hamlet and modern European humanity then are sadly moving towards a morbid state of "not being".

This unexpected atemporal reunion of two states of decay, that of the Renaissance with that of European modernity, is coupled with another unpredicted cultural conflation. In 1927 Lawrence visited Etruscan tombs and wrote a compilation of essays entitled *Etruscan Places*. Much inspired by the lively poetry suggested in the frescoes, he made extensive use of the Etruscan atmosphere in his *Last Poems*. In "The Ship of Death", Hamlet's preoccupation with suicide is quite unexpectedly surrounded by Etruscan décor, where the approach of death and the tomb atmosphere are not handled in a moribund way but with a lively positive dynamism. "The soft effect of relaxed flesh" (*Etruscan Places* 31) which Lawrence perceived in the Etruscan frescoes subtly appears in the image of the fruit at the beginning of the poem, and the whole poem is then punctuated with images and symbols he had seen in the tombs: "dishes", "great jars and bowls, and smaller mixing bowls, and drinking cups" (*Etruscan Places* 31) all reappear in the poem with reference to "food / and little dishes, and all accoutrements" and "little cooking pans" that are to be taken after death on the journey across the sea of change. Etruscan culture, for Lawrence, conveys the mystery of life and "the sense of touch" (*Etruscan Places* 45) and depicts the departure into the underworld (53). Lawrence therefore, caught in an Etruscan enthusiasm for life, came to conceive of death as an after-life journey. With the Etruscans he was attempting to retrieve what he called the "phallic" power of existence, the aristocracy of the self lost both by Hamlet and by Lawrence's contemporaries. In so gathering, within the same poem, Hamlet's words, Etruscan motifs and modern concerns, he proceeds to a sort of modernist syncretic mythmaking through which he, both ontologically and textually, endeavours to overthrow Christian and modern sterile ways of life and to reinfuse vitality in people (including Hamlet), reconnect the latter with the natural cycles of existence, and therefore let them fully physically be, be in touch with "the natural flowing of life" (*Etruscan Places* 49) which he grasps in the Etruscan tombs.

Through this syncretic superintegration in "The Ship of Death", Lawrence uses Hamlet as the epitome of the bitter self-contemptuous man who despises the burning flame that vitalises aristocratic "being". It is when the poetic I faces death that this aspect becomes most obvious.

Fear versus Pagan Trust

Like Hamlet in his "to be, or not to be" soliloquy, Lawrence in "The Ship of Death" ponders suicide and, using the collective "we", widens his narrow personal preoccupation into a larger ontological reflection. Like in *Hamlet* again, in "The Ship of Death" suicide is rejected. The soul, and Lawrence uses the word "soul" to refer to "personality" (*Etruscan Places* 67), would rather prepare its voyage through the sea of oblivion than commit suicide:

And in the bruised body, the frightened soul
finds itself shrinking, wincing from the cold
that blows upon it through the orifices.

III

And can a man his own quietus make
with a bare bodkin?
With daggers, bodkins, bullets, man can make
a bruise or break of exit for his life;
but is that a quietus, O tell me, is it quietus?
Surely not so! for how could murder, even self-murder
ever a quietus make?

IV

O let us talk of quiet that we know
that we can know, the deep and lovely quiet
of a strong heart at peace!
How can we this, our own quietus, make?

The reader immediately recognises Hamlet's words and interrogative rhetorical tone in the first question. But Lawrence is obviously more mundane and pragmatic as he then draws a list of concrete objects that can be of use to make his own quietus ("daggers, bodkins" and the more modern "bullets"), as though he were demonstrating the very practical possibility of the act. He then erects a first obstacle to the "quietus" with "but" (not unlike Hamlet with "But that the dread of something after death") in rhetorically provoking the reader (with "O tell me"), before radically rejecting the option of suicide. Lawrence does not provide any explicit nor rational reason for his rejection. Yet the use of the term "quiet"—which, though it evokes "quietus," is not its root,¹ since it rather implies a "discharge from obligation"—suggests a peaceful approach to natural death that totally diverges from Hamlet's.

If both Lawrence and Hamlet reject suicide, their respective reasons diverge since they rely on contrastive ideas of what "not being" is or, more precisely, on a contrast between Lawrence's idea of "not being" and what he assumes is Hamlet's idea of "not being". For Lawrence "not being" means going through the rich "quiet" darkness he describes as peaceful oblivion; it is a moment of individual, natural and cosmic change whose mystery is never rationally explained nor dissected. This, once again, he found in Etruscan and other pagan rituals. It derives from a faith in the adventure of death which nonetheless requires effort to build one's own ship:

Build then the ship of death, for you must take
the longest journey, to oblivion.
And die the death, the long and painful death
that lies between the old self and the new

¹"Middle English *quietus est*, from Medieval Latin, he is quit, formula of discharge from obligation" (*OED*).

In the aforementioned poem "And Oh—That the Man I Am Might Cease to Be", Lawrence already follows a more or less identical pattern. He first rejects death and then expresses his desire to experience oblivion:

And death would ache still, I am sure;
it would be lambent, uneasy.
I wish it would be completely dark everywhere,
inside me, and out, heavily dark
utterly.

If death is evoked in a more Hamletian way than it is in "The Ship of Death", as the I suggests a kind of fear and uneasiness somewhat echoing Hamlet's "dread of something after death", like in "The Ship of Death", it is the image of a passage through darkness and complete oblivion which is largely favoured. This Lawrentian trust in oblivious "not being" is intimately connected with a trust in the flow of existence, and therefore in "being". According to Lawrence, if one knows how to be, then one will know how not to be, and vice versa. This, he declares in *Twilight in Italy*: "One has to know what not being is, before [one] can be" ("The Theatre" 74). In *Women in Love*, Birkin tells Ursula and Hermione, "You've got to learn not-to-be, before you can come into being" (2000, 44). For in quietly accepting the passage through the changing state of "not being," the soul (meaning the human personality) will fully be again. Death is part of existence, it just happens and cannot be forced into happening. Suicide, which reads as an absence of faith in this tight connection, would interrupt the flow from "being" to "not being," and from "not being" to "being" again. It would therefore disconnect mankind from its circumambient universe and further the noxious enterprise instigated by Christianity just before the Renaissance and continued by mechanical modernity.

Hamlet's rejection of suicide is different. A Lawrentian mind would perhaps too hastily define it as a mere fear of the "undiscovered country", a dreadful apprehension of the unknown and "punitive" (Blits 194) dimension of "not being". Hamlet seems to perceive no potential richness in the ultimate adventure, but only an irreversible voyage which he cowardly refuses to make. The Lawrentian I rather trusts a pagan form of afterlife and thus challenges the preconceived idea of death. Once again, if Lawrence's and Hamlet's ideas of "not being" diverge (for one, not being is a source of renewal whose mystery makes it all the richer, for the other a dreadful, unknown experience), their ideas of "being", according to Lawrence's reading, differ fundamentally too. And this, Lawrence makes particularly explicit in his essay "The Theatre" where he condemns Hamlet's denial of his flesh:

I had always felt an aversion from Hamlet: a creeping, unclean thing he seems [. . .] The character is repulsive in its conception, based on self-dislike and a spirit of disintegration.

There is, I think, this strain of cold dislike, or self-dislike through much of the Renaissance art, and through all the later Shakespeare. [. . .] A sense of corruption in the flesh makes Hamlet frenzied, for he will never admit that

it is his own flesh. [. . .] Hamlet is [. . .] a mental creature, anti-physical, anti-sensual. The whole drama is the tragedy of the convulsed reaction of the mind from the flesh, of the spirit from the self, the reaction from the great aristocratic to the great democratic principle. (68–69)

Throughout this opaque digression on *Hamlet*, Lawrence insistently deplores the split, triggered at the Renaissance, between the Word (embodied in the Son and related to knowing) and the Flesh (embodied in the Father, the King, and related to being). The loss of balance between polarities, and in favour of knowing, led mankind to its “self-conscious disintegration” (Kinkhead-Weekes 267). Hamlet, according to Lawrence, is the epitome of this imbalance in favour of the Word:

The question to be or not to be, which Hamlet puts himself, does not mean, to live or not to live. It is not the simple human being who puts himself the question, it is the supreme I, King and Father. To be or not to be King, Father, in the Self supreme? And the decision is, not to be. (“The Theatre” 70)

In threatening the equilibrium and thus giving advantage to the Word, Hamlet represses his Flesh, over-contemplates his mind and in the end chooses “not to be”. It is on this precise point that Lawrence’s perceptions of both Hamlet and of modern Europeans converge. The problem of their choice for “not being” lies in the fact that neither Hamlet nor the modern human knows “how not to be”. According to Lawrence “not being” is an experience that requires a vitality that they both lack as they apprehend it as a moribund physical state, at once fearful and painful. Their approach to death then cannot be other than fearful. Lawrence, on the other hand, persistently insists on his privileged somewhat pagan acquaintance with a positive experience of “not being”, fundamentally based on a constructive and reconstructive passage through a lively physical experience. On the totally different level of the metatext, Lawrence subtly reveals this privileged acquaintance as, through self-dramatisation, he furtively becomes Hamlet in “The Ship of Death”, therefore not being himself anymore for a few lines, before being his Me again in the following stanza.

Self-Dramatisation

In the aforementioned poem “When I Read Shakespeare,” Lawrence, as a reader or spectator, deplores the failed incarnation of Shakespeare’s poetic language. The characters are merely Words without Flesh. But from his position of criticising spectator in “The Ship of Death”, he shifts to that of a performer: he actually repeats Hamlet’s words, he performs a fragmented and distorted Hamletian role in the intertextual process. In other words, he acts. And to push the metaphor a bit further, we could say that Lawrence is perfunctorily wearing the mask of Hamlet as he is incarnating the speech which he judges dramatically lacks incarnation in Shakespeare’s play.

Hamlet’s words are quite subtly introduced in Lawrence’s speech, with no explicit quoting, and therefore no apparent graft on the surface of the poem. The

Hamletian fragment of discourse is rather smoothly inserted by the conjunction "And" in "And can a man his own quietus make", which reads like an ordinary syntactical development. There is therefore a sort of effort at discretion in the act of putting the Shakespearean mask on. Yet this effort sounds obviously fake, since the reader quickly recognises or unmask the famous words repeated or rehearsed by the Lawrentian I. The very familiar words "can a man his own quietus make / with a bare bodkin" sound like an "anomaly" (Rogers 81) in the ears or eyes of the reader who realises that these are not Lawrence's words. But if this item of public knowledge stands out in the poem, the reader does not hear Hamlet's words alone, but a mere fragment of Hamlet's soliloquy as it is performed by a Lawrentian voice. It is the very hybridisation of both voices and their coexistence in a somewhat Etruscan context that makes new sense, as neither voice annihilates the other. For Lawrence, in fact, incarnates the persona in order not to usurp Hamlet's words, but so as first to add both a dramatic and metaphysical dimension to the poem and then, most of all, to reorient the original Shakespearean discourse. Lawrence thus wants to keep the Hamletian quality created but to relocate it into a lively and positive atmosphere and to remain himself visible behind the mask. As when a spectator is aware that the actor on stage is wearing a mask, the reader is supposed to be aware of the presence of Lawrence's voice behind Hamlet's furtive speech.

On a more symbolic level, Bethan Jones remarks that "the fragments of the text of *Hamlet* are, though changed, modified, subverted, pieces, little accoutrements carried by the dying subject in its travel across the sea" (63). Here Jones' idea fits the analogy drawn in this essay between Hamlet's intertextual fragment and a mask. For the pagans, death was a rite of initiation and quite often primitive people would place a mask on the dead person's face before he was carried away and, not unlike in "The Ship of Death", initiated into the other shore. The mask is therefore a fundamental object in the rite of passage. So if poetically Hamlet's intertextual fragment could be apprehended as one among the pagan objects carried on the ship of death amid pagan décor, on another level, Lawrence, on the eve of dying, was himself, as a man, preparing his own crossing to the other shore, wearing the mask of the "great poet" (Conrad 128) whose poetic language he fundamentally admired, performing a form of ritual in the brotherhood of poets.

As he speaks through Hamlet's mask and recontextualises the scene in a celebrated Etruscan setting, the Lawrentian poetic I rescues the living potential of the dramatic persona. At the moment of cultural and individual death, he gives new impetus to the Shakespearean language and gives it new flesh by exalting it in a pagan environment. That is where the poetic level is in keeping with Lawrence's ontological message: "It is the end, it is oblivion [. . .] / A flush of rose and the whole thing starts again". The prosaic phrase "the whole thing", with its quite vague extratextual reference, could well be apprehended as including life and poetry. The soul reemerges after a passage through "not being", just as the poetic voices do: Lawrence's voice "is" again, after being Hamlet fleetingly, and Hamlet is again too, in the poem, as he is newly incarnated, given flesh, by the poetic voice.

So if Corcoran raises the question about the “provoking or sterilizing” (Corcoran 3) nature of Shakespearean intertextuality, here, the hybridisation of poetic voices is surely thematically and metapoetically provoking.

Lawrence seems to be using Hamlet as the epitome of both the Renaissance and the modern demoralised man. In incarnating and relocating Hamlet’s speech, Lawrence makes it “be” again, while he simultaneously rejects Hamlet’s conception of “not being” as he too refuses the quietus. In his essay “The Theatre”, Lawrence makes his own position quite clear: besides referring to erroneous apprehensions of “being” and “not being”, it seems that one of the fundamental problems of Hamlet’s question is its exclusiveness—“to be or not to be”, Lawrence comments, “it is no longer our question, at least, not in the same sense” (“The Theatre” 73). For indeed, Lawrence adds, “It is a question of knowing *how to be*, and *how not to be*, for we must fulfil both” (73). The widening movement implicit in “how” is coupled with the disappearance of the exclusive “or” in favour of the combining “and”. For Lawrence, one can “be” in accepting the flow that leads to “not to be” and vice versa. It is not a matter of choice between two opposite alternative possibilities that a suicidal act could resolve. It is “being” and “not being” caught together in the dynamic flow of vital life.

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